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GROUPS SNUB GOV'T REVIEW

Change urged

By LINCOLN DEPRADINE

The Jamaican Canadian Association (JCA) says changes must be made to the way the Government of Ontario is going about with its review of the Special Investigations Unit (SIU) and other police watchdog groups.

A Cabinet-appointed committee — headed by former deputy Solicitor General Rod McLeod, and including a criminal lawyer and three government bureaucrats — must complete its work and make recommendations to the ruling Conservative administration by the middle of this month.

Critics are not only upset at the composition of the committee, but are angry at the short notice community members

have been given to make submissions and present briefs.

JCA president Herman Stewart said the organization will not make a representation or submit a brief to the committee. "The process set up by the government and Mr. McLeod is fundamentally flawed and has been structured without any meaningful concern for the Black community's issues and interests," he said.

"The terms of reference were developed without any community consultations and remain fixed, in spite of expressed concerns about community exclusion."

Stewart added that "credible community input could hardly be expected" because of the short-time-line established for presentations from members of the community.

In addition to the JCA, several other organizations, from within and outside the Black community, have also condemned the government's review process, vowing not to participate in the exercise.

The leaders of some of the organizations outlined their positions at a news conference last month, and reiterated their stance at a subsequent meeting with the government-appointed committee.

The government says the review is necessary because the current system of civilian oversight of policing is "confusing" and "frustrating," and claims that it wants to create an "open, accessible and accountable" process.

However, groups like the African Canadian Legal Clinic, the Chinese and Southeast Asian Legal Clinic, the Black Action Defense Committee and the JCA, do not believe that.

"The government has done everything to ensure there will be no opposition to what the police have recommended," said Avvy Go of the Chinese and Southeast Asian Legal Clinic.

"The worst fear is they'll take away or scale down the SIU!"

The JCA is demanding that the government put in place "a process that is truly open to community input."